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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1678
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001955

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV KISL PINS IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQI POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS FIGURES CALL FOR CALM FOLLOWING SECOND SAMARRA ATTACK

Classified By: PolCouns Margaret Scobey for reasons for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The second bombing attack on the Imam Ali al-Hadi "al-Askariya" or golden mosque in Samarra occurred at approximately 0900 local time June 13 resulting in the destruction of two minarets. The first attack in February 2006 set in motion major retaliation against Sunni mosques and an increase in nationwide sectarian violence that has only recently begun to subside. Today's bombing has GOI leadership anxious about maintaining security. In an effort to prevent renewed violence, the GOI imposed a 1500 curfew on Baghdad residents. Iraqi political and religious figures have responded to the tragic event with calls for calm and unity; some criticized the GOI for failing to provide adequate security for the holy sites; Sadr called for calm but blamed "the hidden hand" of U.S. forces for the attack and announced three days of morning and peaceful demonstrations against the occupation. Baghdad remains calm.

ISCI Response

¶2. (C) During a regular meeting of the Political Committee of the U.S.-ISCI Strategic Dialogue, Vice President Abdel Mehdi revealed breaking news of the bombing in Samarra. Abdel Mehdi expressed concern about the situation in Samarra and the possibility of igniting a new cycle sectarian violence. According to the VP, ISCI Chief Abd al Aziz al-Hakim, calling from his hospital room in Tehran, was also extremely worried. Abdel Mehdi feared it would be difficult to control the situation. Sheikh Hammoudi, also present, warned of an explosion of sectarian violence and suggested that the U.S. send a strong signal of reassurance to the Shia, adding that "mere statements will not be enough."

¶3. (U) The ISCI website carried a statement by al-Hakim blaming Saddamists and takfiris for the tragedy. He urged the Iraqi people not to allow themselves to be "led by terrorist plots to ignite sectarian sedition that might culminate in a civil war." According to press report, al-Hakim phoned both President Talibani and PM Maliki to stress that the GOI must carry out its duties to protect holy shrines and bring about security and stability.

Religious Authorities

¶4. (U) Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani denounced "takfiri acts" targeting the holy al-Askariya mosque and called for restraint in order to "deny those fomenting sedition the chance to carry out their schemes." Sistani called on Shia not to carry out reprisals against Sunnis or their religious sites. The Iraqi Sunni Muslim Scholars Council (Ulema) blamed the Interior Ministry's special forces for the explosion for failing to protect the holy shrine as well as

U.S. forces and the GOI for the overall negative situation in Iraq. The Ulema's statement characterized the bombing as a "desperate attempt to tear up the national unity of the Iraqi people."

Sadr Blames Occupation and GOI, Bloc Boycotts Parliament

¶ 15. (U) Radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr condemned the attack and called for calm. He blamed the U.S. "occupation" for the bombing and criticized the GOI for not providing better security. Sadr called for three days of mourning to mark the destruction of the minarets, saying "no rival Sunni Arab could have been responsible." Later in the day the Sadr Council of Representatives (CoR) bloc announced its decision to boycott Parliament until the GOI takes strong measures to reconstruct all the Sunni and Shia shrines, beginning with the al-Askariya mosque in Samarra. (Note: The CoR's next session is not until June 19. End note.)

President's Reaction

¶ 16. (U) President Talibani condemned the "criminal explosion" and called on Iraqis to "remain calm, show self-control, and foil the intentions of those who want to spread the flame of conflict and stir hostility." He blamed terrorists for the attack and called on the Iraqi security apparatus to take immediate steps to control the situation.

Maliki Makes Televised Address

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¶ 17. (U) Iraqiyya Television carried a recorded speech by Prime Minister Maliki in which he blamed al-Qaida and Saddamists for the attack and urged all who are on the side of stability and reconciliation to condemn the attacks. The PM said he had given orders to security forces to take more "vigilant measures" to protect all holy shrines. Maliki urged Iraqis to practice self-restraint and not exploit the event for political objectives.

VP Hashemi's Iraqi Islamic Party

¶ 18. (C) The IIP issued a statement strongly denouncing the "cowardly act" calling it a desperate attempt to launch new waves of violence. The IIP called for unity and kinship among all Iraqi people and for them to resist this "conspiracy designed to fragment unity." Vice President Hashemi's political advisor told PolOff that despite sporadic violence "overall things are quiet," But that he was concerned the bombing would be used as an opportunity to pursue sectarian agenda.

Conditions in Baghdad

¶ 19. (C) Baghdad District Advisory Council (DAC) Chairman Muslim Al-Falah in Kadhamiya noted horrific traffic because of the curfew, but no demonstrations or outward signs of anger in the area. He told Baghdad PRT that he expects backlash, including attacks on Sunni mosques and demonstrations. He said Sistani and other political and religious leaders are calling for calm, which may or may not help. Acting DAC Chair Dawood Al-Adhamy in Adhamiya said things are calm in the Sunni part of Adhamiya so far, but they are hunkering down in their homes and waiting to get hit by JAM. DAC member Haydar Zeydan in Sadr City said things

are calm but tense so far. He expects demonstrations and said since Sadr is publicly blaming CF for the bombing, perhaps an elevation in violence against CF.

¶110. (C) Governor Hussein Tahan told PRTOFF that the attack reflects badly on the central government and the coalition's ability to provide security. He said he expects less fallout than from the last Samara bombings because the government has a better idea what to expect and immediately imposed a curfew. He said they have received some reports of small demonstrations in Shia areas and scattered violence, but that it was hard to say if the violence was "normal" or related to the bombing. The head of the Provincial Council security committee, Majid Shwayli, said he expects less reaction to this attack than the previous bombing of the shrine. He said the immediate imposition of the curfew will probably help keep a lid on further violence at least temporarily. Advisor to the Minister of State for Reconciliation reports that in the Shia-dominated Karada Baghdad neighborhood everything is quiet and residents are abiding by the curfew.

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